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S E R M O N

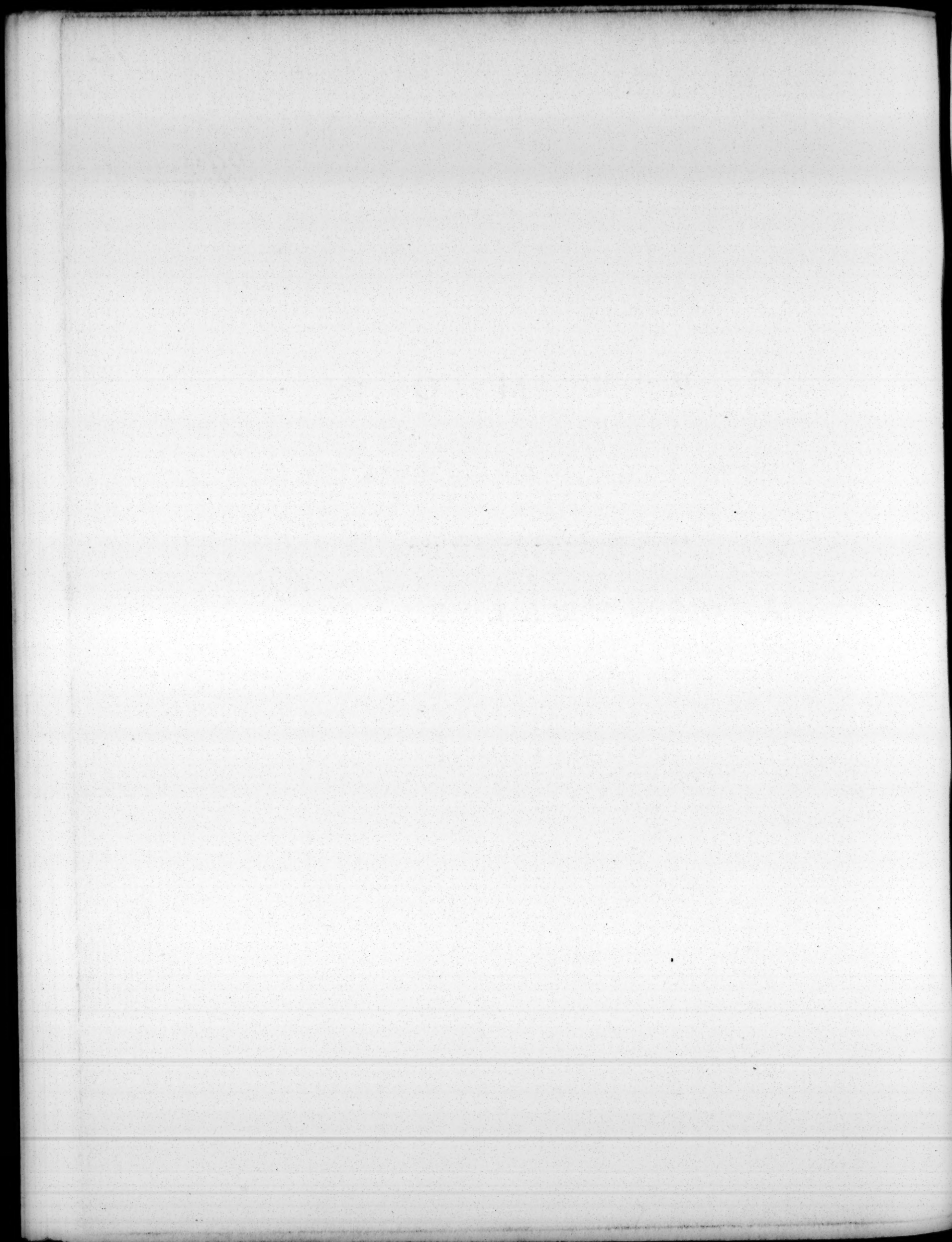
Preached at YORK on the 21st of *February*, 1781,

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED FOR

A G E N E R A L F A S T,

By JAMES SCOTT, D.D.

[PRICE ONE SHILLING.]



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Preached at YORK on the 21st of *February*, 1781,

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED FOR

A GENERAL FAST.

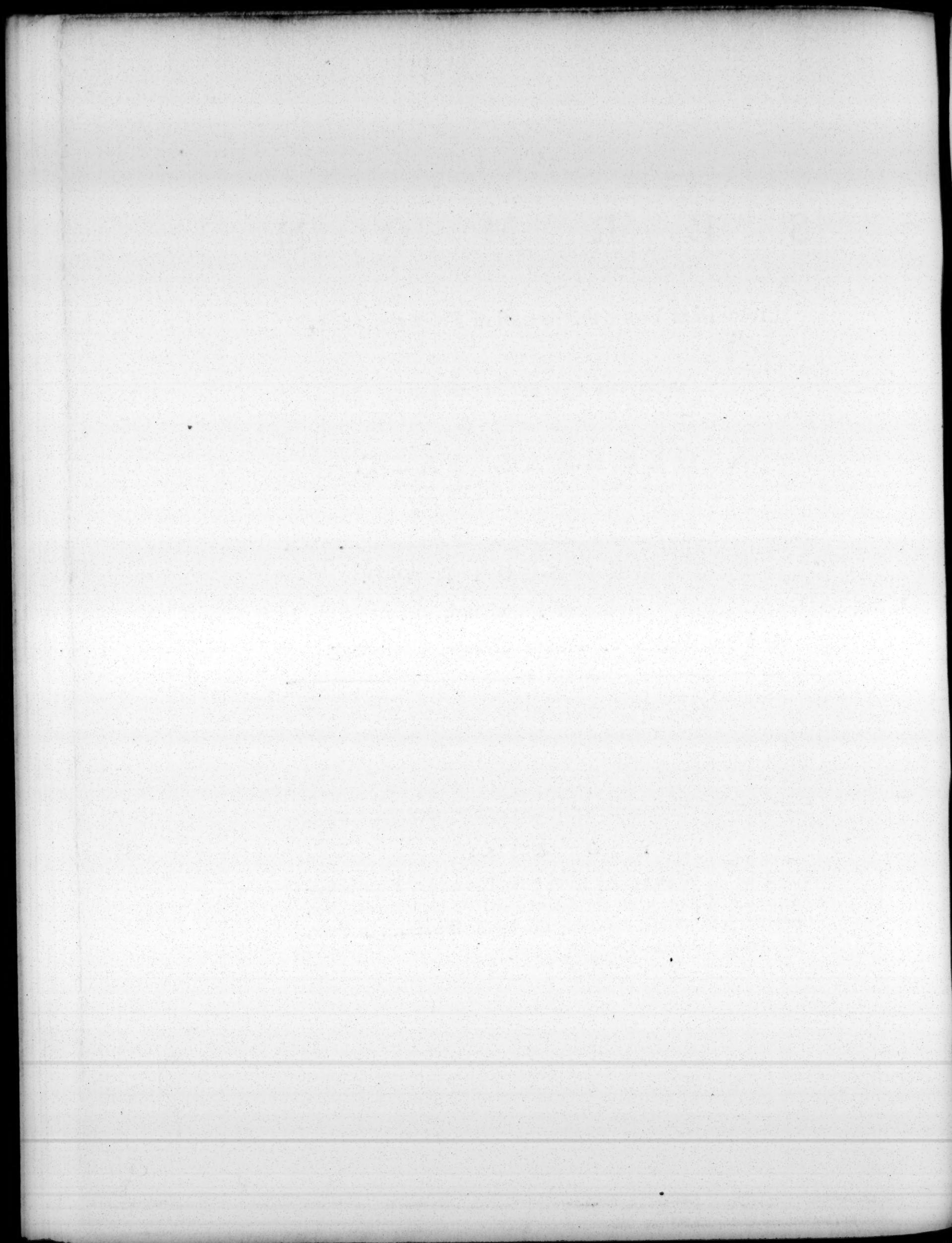
By JAMES SCOTT, D.D.

Rector of Simonburn,

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Y O R K:

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S E R M O N.

LUKE xiii. 2, 3.

SUPPOSE YE THAT THESE GALILEANS WERE SIN-
NERS ABOVE ALL THE GALILEANS, BECAUSE
THEY SUFFERED SUCH THINGS?—I TELL YOU,
NAY: BUT EXCEPT YE REPENT, YE SHALL
ALL LIKEWISE PERISH.

A MAN must either be totally uninformed, or
at best an inobservant Reader of History,
who is not convinced from a variety of
events, recorded in the annals of almost all ages and
countries, that the greatest temporal evils have fre-
quently been inflicted upon men, on account of their
Sins. God has so contrived it, by the order of his
providence, that many vices bring with them their
own punishment: they have their proper and ap-
pointed scourges; and a man need not ask what
Vulture shall prey upon this Carcase, for the Divine
B Judgment

Judgment points at the Sin, and keeps a regular and stated rule in striking.

It happens too, not unfrequently, that there is a strong analogy and resemblance between the Sin and the Punishment ; inasmuch that the guilty person is the first to accuse himself, and to cry out with Adonibezek, As I have done so hath God requited me.

It would be too heavy a tax upon your time and patience, to enumerate all the particular instances in divine story, where wickedness has drawn down immediate and signal vengeance from Heaven : a few will be abundantly sufficient to convince every reasonable and impartial person, that God has not left himself without witness in all ages, by hurling down speedy destruction on the heads of impenitent offenders. It was Sin, that overwhelmed the old world with a deluge of water, wherein all mankind, except eight persons, perished. It was Sin, that caused God to rain down fire and brimstone from Heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah. It was Sin, that provoked the earth to open her mouth, and swallow up alive Corah and his rebellious company. It was Sin, that destroyed, in the Wilderness, six hundred

hundred thousand fighting men of the children of Israel, and Caleb and Joshua were the only persons who possessed the promise. It was Sin, that drove out seven nations from the land of Canaan, when the measure of their iniquity was full. It was the stubbornness and infidelity of the Jews, that ruined their Temple and Government, that slew the greatest part of them, and made the rest fugitives and vagabonds upon the face of the earth. And as to these Galileans mentioned in my text, our blessed Saviour, *tacitly* at least, admitted that their calamity was a judgment inflicted upon them by God for their Sins. Whether they were good men or bad, we are not expressly told: It is generally supposed they were part of the followers of Judas the Gaulonite—a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition, who, under the specious pretence of reforming Grievances, endeavoured to inflame the people to civil insurrection.

Josephus informs us, that he affected the warmest and most violent attachment to Liberty, civil and religious; instructing the people that their only Ruler was God—that they owed no obedience, no subjection to any one else—that every other controul was tyranny, every other authority was usurpation—

and he called upon them to hazard their lives in vindication of their natural Rights, and indefeisible Liberties. By such inflammatory harangues as these—calculated for the meridian of Pride, Passion, and Interest—he **associated** a motley crew—a happy mixture of Knaves and Fools—the turbulent Leveler—the Man of desperate hopes, and desperate fortune—the ambitious, the disappointed, the revengeful—the real Rebel, who wished to overturn the Government, and the needy Patriot, who fought only his own private Interest and Advantage.

From these men, says Josephus, sprang all kinds of misfortunes,—robberies, murders, and CONFLAGRATIONS:—Nay, it was the disseminations of this turbulent Seducer, that produced that plentiful crop of calamities, which afterwards destroyed the whole Jewish nation.

It is an eventful melancholy circumstance to any kingdom, when principles of sedition take root and flourish: The fruit at first may look fair and promising, good for food, and pleasant to the eye; but as you come to gather it, like the apples of Sodom, it turns to ashes and bitterness; or, like that
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of Eden, to misery and death. Nothing commonly is more popular in the beginning than Sedition, and nothing less so in the end. It enters upon the stage in the most gallant manner, with a brave and goodly appearance: its aims are all open and generous, its professions fair, specious, and plausible: it has the voice indeed of Jacob; but the hands are the hands of Esau—it destroys, with schemes of Reformation; enslaves, under the glorious name of Liberty; and scatters firebrands and ruin—purely for the public good.

Professions of Patriotism and Disinterestedness, though made by men of the most selfish and profligate characters, are generally heard with approbation, and believed with greediness: for there is a plentiful stock of credulity, and a lamentable want of wisdom and judgment in the bulk of mankind, who seldom see far before them, and hardly distinguish between the names and nature of things, till experience, it may be dear-bought experience, shews them the difference. And this might be the case with these very Galileans—seduced by the artful insinuations of their turbulent leader, they swerved from their allegiance, and fell victims to the zeal

and cruelty of Pilate. There is no sufficient reason for thinking them more wicked than the rest of the Jews; though it is certain they were Sinners, and punished in that extraordinary manner for their wickedness. All have sinned, says the Apostle, and come short of the Glory of God; and, therefore, there is no man but may deservedly be punished; and when any one is visited with afflictions, it may safely be asserted, that he suffers justly whatever he suffers in this world, either by the appointment or permission of Almighty God.

But though we need not be scrupulous in thinking, or saying that the calamities which befall mankind, are in gross the effects and consequences of Sin; yet is it a wrong construction of God's Judgments, to pronounce that those are always the greatest Sinners, who are the greatest Sufferers.

Rash man! to convince thee how uncharitable and false is this way of arguing—look unto Jesus, the glorious King of sufferings, and of sorrows! Behold him, who was Innocence itself, unspotted, perfect Innocence, stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted!

licted ! His Life, we know, was one continued scene of persecution and wretchedness, and his Death the consummation of ignominy and torment !

The Jews, who crucified him, laid hold on This afterwards, as a pretence for rejecting him : they could not induce themselves to believe that a just and good God would ever permit an innocent person to die in a manner so cruelly and infamously. They made his sufferings an argument for charging him with guilt ; rashly concluding that he lived not the Life of a righteous person, since he died the Death of a malefactor.

It is evident therefore in fact that the most eminent Sufferers are not always the most eminent Sinners : And, indeed, in the natural course of things, it is not possible that they should be so. Thus in the time, for instance, of some general calamity, such as Wars, Inundations, Fires, Earthquakes, and the like, it is impossible, without working miracle upon miracle, so entirely to sever the good from the bad, or so exactly to range the wicked according to their demerits, that none should suffer but those who have most deserved it.—And
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though doubtless some men are punished, and others delivered by extraordinary means, and God's more immediate hand, yet there is no reason to think that it is the general method of Providence to interpose by special miracles, wherever such occasions happen. Besides, if it were the constant and invariable method of the Almighty, to take vengeance in the first place upon the most wicked, many would be thereby encouraged to go on in their Sins, as long as they should imagine there were yet any men left worse than themselves : And considering how apt most persons are to think favourably of themselves, and very hardly of others, such a rule of procedure would be of dangerous and fatal consequence, would be a great encouragement to presumption, and a bar to amendment.—Divine Wisdom, therefore, has established no such method of visitation as this ; but reserves to itself the liberty of executing vengeance upon Sinners in general, whether more or less guilty. Away then with that pragmatical custom, the most uncharitable employment we can find for our thoughts, of condemning others, as being Sinners above all men, merely because they suffer the most in this world. It is a false, wicked, inhuman way of reasoning, which neither Scripture nor Reason

fon countenances. From what a man does, we may form a judgment of his moral conduct, but from what he suffers we cannot: the former is a Rule which Christ himself has given us, and, therefore, we may safely apply it: But the latter is a Rule of our own inventing, which nothing but a want of Charity could suggest. Our Saviour, we see, has discountenanced it in my Text; telling those, who were so forward to draw conclusions to the prejudice of the unfortunate Galileans, that their extraordinary sufferings by no means implied extraordinary guilt: Thus checking that malicious spirit, which is apt to break out in unjustifiable liberties, with respect to other people's Characters; and admonishing them at the same time, that if they did not repent, they should all likewise perish.

Here, Christians, lies the whole stress of the business: This is the momentous conclusion, which our blessed Master drew from the premises, "except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." The Jews, to whom he addressed these words, did indeed, at the destruction of Jerusalem, literally perish in great multitudes, by the very same calamity which before had fallen upon these wretched Galileans:

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lileans : The Temple was every where polluted with slaughter : Those who worshipped fell before their Sacrifices, and sprinkled the Altar with their blood; infomuch, says the Historian, that the blood of the dead carcases made a pool in the holy court.

From the dreadful catastrophe which befell the Jews, who at this day are a living monument of the truth and vengeance of God, we shall do well to consider how far we ourselves are concerned in the admonition in my text, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." The divine judgments have for some time past been abroad in the earth, and in many parts of it have done most signal execution. Need I instance the late terrible havock in the Western Islands; where the destroying angel, the Spirit of divine vengeance, seems to have rode triumphant on the storm, and to have swept all before him into heaps of ruin and devastation? Whether God will bring his Judgments still nearer to us, and say, Sword go through this land to destroy it, would be rash and presumptuous to determine. However, taking a transient view of circumstances without, and symptoms within ourselves, there is surely sufficient reason to follow the advice of the Apostle,

Apostle, Not to be high-minded, but fear. If we look abroad we see one of the most dangerous and dreadful confederacies that ever threatened any nation; so that we are almost in the same situation with Ishmael, whose hand was against every man, and every man's hand against him. Unsupported by one single Ally, we have to contend—not with our inveterate enemies only—but with our ancient friends, as well as bosom traitors; who are all infamously leagued together to assist the Rebellious Colonists, in realizing their visions of Independency; hoping, by this means, to dismember the Empire, and lay the ax to the very root of our Commerce, Navigation, and Power. Surely such a moment of danger as this, such a crisis of impending horror, might rouse Supineness, and alarm Insensibility itself!

If we look at home, there are the plainest prognostics of some approaching dreadful calamity. It is remarkable in the decline of all Empires, when God gives them the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath, that the people become intoxicated, and lost to sober thought and serious reflection: Their Councils are weak and timid, divided and

fluctuating: God sets them one against another, as he did the Egyptians against the Egyptians; and they fight every one against his brother, and every one against his neighbour: And God takes away the wisdom of the wise, and the understanding of the prudent; and he mingles a perverse spirit in the midst thereof; and they gaze on each other amazed and confounded, full of doubts, full of terrours, unable to give or take advice, and far more ready to upbraid each other with weak and womanly invectives, than to consult together for the common Good, and public Safety.

Would to God that this faint sketch bore no resemblance to our present situation; or rather, would to God that we could stay the uplifted arm of the Almighty, and plead our righteousness in arrest of judgment! But this, I am afraid, we cannot do!—We are here called together, by public authority, to confess our Sins, and humble ourselves before God: Let us consider then what our Sins are, our particular and predominant Sins; for we shall apply a remedy in vain, till we find out the true seat of our distemper.

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To begin then with our public offences as a Nation : Is it not notorious that a spirit of selfishness and venality actuates the whole mass of the people, and discovers itself by a total disregard to the public welfare ? It is to This, as the immediate and proximate cause, that all our distresses are to be attributed. We see a desperate Faction, influenced by the most sordid motives, conspiring against the honour of their Sovereign, the Majesty of the Constitution, and the happiness, I had almost said the very existence, of their Country. How indefatigable have they been in fanning the flames of that unhappy Rebellion, which their own seditious conduct first kindled ? What unwearied pains have they taken to exaggerate the weakness of ourselves, and the strength of our enemies ; thus encouraging and calling forth the exertions of the one, while they damp and impede the spirit of the other ? The only fortunate circumstance is, that in all their agonies and contentions for power, they have betrayed such an impudent contempt of character, such a barefaced and profligate prostitution of principle, that they are the detestation and horror of all good men. In former times a spirit of selfishness has too often prevailed, and, in some bosoms, stifled all regard for the public

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lic welfare: But there was a difference in the manner of its proceeding: It was ashamed to shew itself, and would hide its head, and, like a dirty sewer, ran underground, and made little noise: But now, though the stream be not a jot purer, it bursts out like a torrent, and dashes in our very faces, and bears down all before it, and in the end, I fear, will overwhelm this devoted country with ruin.

Another national Sin, which is indeed the natural consequence of the former, is a want of Reverence for their Governours, and an impatience of all rule and order among the lower class of the people. Indeed how is it possible that they should entertain favourable opinions of that Government, which is every day bespattered by a lawless Faction, with the most opprobrious language? Or think those measures honest and expedient, which are uniformly vilified, opposed, and obstructed? When all the fences of Decency and Order are thus laid level with the ground, it is no wonder that the people should overlook and transgress them: Accordingly a kind of confusion seems to run thro' the whole community; and the great chain of society, which holds us all together, though perhaps not absolutely broken, is strangely entangled:

entangled: One degree presses close, and treads upon the very heels of another, impatient of all controul and subordination. Never were levelling and seditious principles so frequently and daringly scattered, as at present; which is a strong symptom of impending mischief: For as flies and other insects are most troublesome immediately before a storm; so doctrines of this nature are observed to fly abroad, and disquiet and goad the people more particularly, just at the beginning of calamitous times.

A third crying Sin of this nation is—What shall I call it?—Atheism?—This is too mild a term for that impudent contempt of Religion, and of every thing serious and sacred, which stigmatizes the present age. There have always been men foolish and corrupt enough to say in their hearts, There is no God; but their numbers have been few in comparison, and they kept their opinions chiefly at home; or if they ventured them abroad, it was in the dark, dressed out with modesty and bashfulness, either cloathed in doubts and scruples, or veiled in allusion and allegory: But this is all over—Infidelity now steps boldly forth in loose attire like a harlot, and stares us in the face at noon-day with brazen impudence,

impudence, laughing at every thing that is grave, and burlesquing every thing that is holy: just as the Jews did of old, when they made sport of God's Prophets, when they turned the expressions of Jeremiah into ridicule, and the words of Ezekiel into pleasant songs.—When a nation is so abandoned as to add impudence to obstinacy, and not only to neglect Religion, but to turn it into jest and drollery, be sure, my Brethren, God's terrible judgments hang over their heads by a very slender slender thread, and they are in momentary danger of utter destruction!

These, then, are Vices of a public nature, in which we may boldly challenge the depravity of the worst and most abandoned age to exceed us. Let us now descend to private life, and shall we not find that an unbridled licence of manners generally prevails among us? That Fashion and Custom have given a kind of prescription to Vice, and that Virtue is almost worn out of date, and laughed out of countenance? Do we not meet with fraud and cozenage, oppression and falsehood, ingratitude and baseness, in our dealings with one another? Is not Pleasure more followed than Piety, and Mammon much more devoutly served than God? I am almost

almost ashamed even to mention our enormous Excesses—that Riot and Debauchery, that Effeminacy and Frivolism, that Gaming, Swearing, and Blapheming—Sins of so deep a dye, and yet so rife among us, such overflowings of ungodliness may well make us afraid—afraid lest the Almighty should visit for these things, and his Soul be avenged on such a nation as this. It is plain from the experience of past ages, that more states have been ruined by a Corruption of Manners, than by a Violation of the Laws: and yet how jealous are we of the slightest infringement of the one; how careless and indifferent, though the whole nation be deluged by the other? What was it that overthrew all the mighty kingdoms in the East, but their wickedness? What that destroyed the Roman Empire, which rose to such a pitch of grandeur upon the ruins of the others, but Licentiousness and Corruption of Manners? God was pleased to let loose his great Northern Army, the rudest, most barbarous, and inexperienced people in matters of war, upon the most civilized and instructed nation, protected by veteran troops inured to discipline, and defended by walled cities and fortifications—Yet what was the consequence? Rude and inexperienced as the Barbarians were, they proved

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victorious,

victorious, when God was pleased to make use of them as his instruments to punish a nation, who had filled up the measure of their iniquity: for in the hand of Almighty Power it is a matter of no consequence how trifling or insignificant soever the instrument is: He can cause a swarm of insects to commit greater ravages than the fiercest army; and a breeze of wind to be more fatal and desolating, than the breath of the savagest and most destructive tyrant!

As it is so fearful a thing then to fall into the hands of the living God, let us resolve from this very moment to turn from the evil of our ways, that iniquity may not be our ruin. Perhaps it is not too late to avert by Repentance the impending blow: Tho' the dangers which hang over us be fearfully great and imminent—tho' the whole political atmosphere be black and louring, and Heaven's dreadful artillery seem ready to burst upon our heads—yet if we seek unto God, with humble and contrite hearts, he shall either hide us under the shadow of his wings, or command the hovering storm to pass off like a cloud. But let us remember that Repentance without amendment is futile and ridiculous; and

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as we have been brought into our present perilous situation by a spirit of selfishness and faction, let no man for the future seek his own, but every one the general welfare. Let us regard those Miscreants, as the enemies and pests of their country, who endeavour to plunge the nation into despondency, to distract our councils, to clog the wheels of government by frivolous and vexatious complaints, and, under the false and specious pretence of Liberty, to introduce anarchy, confusion, and every evil work. The magnitude and imminence of those difficulties and dangers which surround us require the most united councils and vigorous exertions: let us then join heart and hand in defence of our Sovereign and our country; a country which, for ages, has been the envy and admiration of the world; and a Sovereign, whose only aim and desire are to support its independence and glory, to preserve its constitution free and inviolate, and with all the anxiety of a tender Father to promote the real interests and prosperity of his people. Let such be our conduct with regard to public affairs: In private life, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us: let us eschew evil, and learn to do good:—so may we rest assured, that how great soever our

transgressions have been, yet thro' the merits of an all-sufficient Saviour, the Lord will have mercy upon us, and our God will abundantly pardon: He will hear our prayers and grant our petitions, and unite this miserable and too-long distracted Empire: He will silence the Tumult of contending Factions—will prosper our Councils, assuage our Animosities, and make us once more a happy, and a flourishing people: In short, he will receive us all into his care and protection; will assist, direct, and bless us while we live, and in the end give us an inheritance among them who are sanctified by Faith.

